

An open letter to the men and government of New Zealand

It's difficult to know how to express the horror so many of us feel about what happened to Grace Millane. She was 21, on the trip of a lifetime, with her whole life ahead of her... and then she was gone.

When young women are murdered, it reminds women that our safety is an illusion. We have some of the worst statistics for sexual violence, domestic violence and violence against women in the OECD. Most of that violence is at the hands of our men.

This is a time for national soul-searching. It is also a time for solution-based action.

To the New Zealand government, based on the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women's recommendations, we ask you to:

- Adopt a comprehensive and cross-party strategy on preventing and ending gender based violence against women;
- Run public awareness and behavioural change programmes in collaboration with teachers and the media, including social media, to promote understanding and prevention of violence against women, and encourage victims and witnesses to report violence;
- Allocate adequate resources to comprehensive and evidence-based prevention of violence against women;
- Ensure that every woman in Aotearoa New Zealand, from every community and background, has access to culturally appropriate domestic and sexual violence support and healing services when and where they need it.

To the men of New Zealand, we ask that you:

- Respect all women. Do not touch us without our consent. Do not pressure us into having sex. Do not physically, mentally or emotionally abuse us;
- Listen openly to conversations about violence against women. Don't react defensively by insisting that 'not all men' are bad. We know they're not. But most violence towards women is committed by men. Help us to change that;
- If your male friends are discussing women in a degrading manner, ask them to stop;
- If you see a woman being harassed or abused by a man, step in and offer support.

Women going on solo adventures or meeting new people for dates are not the problem here. Men who commit acts of violence against women are. But violence is preventable if we work together at an individual, whānau, community, regional and national level.

Most decent New Zealanders will be devastated by Grace's death. The vast majority of us feel horrified for her parents and her family, and send them all our love. But we must open our eyes to the dangers facing women in our country. We must remove our rose-tinted glasses. The government and men of New Zealand must take action; for Grace and for all of the women who have lost their lives to violence in our country.

Rest in peace and aroha, Grace. On behalf of all New Zealanders, we are so very, very sorry. We promise to do better as a nation.

Signed by Rt Hon. Helen Clark, Rt Hon. Dame Jenny Shipley, Dame Silvia Cartwright, Dame Trelise Cooper, Theresa Gattung CNZM, Jennifer Ward-Lealand ONZM, Ranjna Patel ONZM, QSM, Joan Withers, Cecilia Robinson, Lizzie Marvelly, Laura O'Connell-Rapira, Alison Mau, Sarah Paykel ONZM, Annette Presley ONZM, Paula Penfold, Nadia Lim, Jackie Clark (The Aunties), Mihingarangi Forbes, Michèle A'Court, Anika Moa, Urzila Carlson, Dr Siouxsie Wiles, Anya Satyanand, Marianne Elliott, Anna Guenther, Matilda Rice, Kimberley Crossman, Linda Jenkinson, Wendy Thompson, Bridgette Jackson, Rochelle Sheldon, Vanisa Dhiru, Prue Kapua, Nicole Skews-Poole, Anna Dean, Angela Meyer, Lani Evans, Nicola Woodward, Ta'ase Vaoga, Tania Sawicki Mead, Sofia Ambler, Sue Dunmore, Rebecca Stewart, Madeline Sami, National Council of Women New Zealand, Amnesty International New Zealand, Māori Women's Welfare League, JustSpeak, ActionStation, Aviva, Wellington Sexual Abuse HELP Foundation, Auckland Sexual Abuse HELP Foundation, Rape Prevention Education, InsideOUT, Auckland Women's Centre, Wellington Rape Crisis, YWCA Auckland, Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association, YouthLaw

For a list of other ways you can take action and organisations you can donate time or money to, visit www.HelpWahine.org.nz.